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Expanding handrail producer moving to new facility

LANCASTER (AP) — One of the county's best-kept secrets for three years, Handrail Design Inc. has created a buzz by boosting sales 130 percent and growing the number of employees at exponential rates.

Not surprisingly, principals Kevin and Tracy Downs will move HDI from its cramped facility to a brand new West Hempfield Township building next summer. HDI will break ground early this month on the company's new 30,000-square-foot facility on Continental Drive, not far from the Prospect Road exit of Route 30. The two-phase project leaves room for a 22,000-square-foot addition.

HDI products are an architect's dream: high-end stainless handrails, custom-curved guardrails made of tempered glass, perforated stainless panels and picket designs.

The company has placed its elaborate fixtures in corporate structures, universities (including Princeton, Delaware and Maryland), libraries, mansions, beach homes and ski resorts and museums — even Epcot Center in Disney World.

Originally from South Shields, near Newcastle, England, the Downs's came to the United States in 1989. Kevin came to Lancaster to work at HEWI, a German architectural hardware firm, which had just moved its U.S. headquarters here from Allendale, N.J.

In early 2002, eight years after Kevin became HEWI's Lancaster plant manager, HEWI decided to close its local facility at 2851 Old Tree Drive — now the home of Kegel's Produce — to focus on its European operations.

That year, the Downs's launched HDI. HEWI agreed to sell Downs the rails and guardrails manufacturing and design rights, as well as much of its manufacturing equipment.

Since then, HDI has grown from eight employees to more than 50: engineers, drafters, estimators, assemblers and machinists, as well as staff for information technology, sales, customer service and office workers.

The company has sales staff and installation crews on the East Coast, Midwest and West coast

While HDI focuses on the rails and guardrails, it has added to the HEWI line, integrating sections of stainless rail with glass, wood, brass, marble, granite and even leather.

HDI's new facility, which will feature a split-face brick front with offices in an open floor plan design — with HDI elements, of course — will allow the company to expand its door-handle designs and produce additional architectural hardware.